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AUTHOR Brouillette, Liane
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ABSTRACT

Since the 1960s, a dizzying array of educational reforms have been introduced in school districts across the United States. This book describes a study that focused on how successive waves of reform interacted within a single school district. The study follows the suburban Cottonwood School District from its beginnings in the early 1950s through the early 1990s. The study examines the multiple misunderstandings that occurred, over a period of four decades, among individuals whose formative experiences with public schools were shaped by widely differing historical circumstances and philosophical perspectives. Data were derived from document analysis; observation; and interviews with and a survey of school board members, administrators, teachers, support personnel, and community members. Following the introduction, chapter 2 outlines how the shared decision-making process was intended to operate within the site-based environment established by the most recent superintendent. Chapter 3 explores the historical bedrock upon which later events in the district were built. The fourth chapter traces the reforms implemented by the superintendent who served during 1972-82. He was a strong believer in Management by Objectives, Mastery Learning, and criterion-referenced testing. The district-level organizational structure that evolved out of the shared decision-making process is described in chapter 5. It discusses strategic planning efforts, curriculum development, and how usage of the term "performance based" came to refer to complex activities requiring higher order thinking skills. Chapter 6 focuses on how the district implemented its new curriculum framework in a site-based environment. The seventh chapter traces the differing paths that the district's three high schools have followed since implementation of site-based decision making. Chapter 8 discusses the use of shared decision making to address districtwide concerns, such as high school attendance and budget cuts. The final chapter describes how the differing lenses through which various groups have viewed major issues have created misunderstandings. Four tables and an index are included. (Contains 48 references.) (LMI)